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Evaluating Climate Change Adaptation Options

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STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

PAUL R. LEPAGE
GOVERNOR

PATRICIA W. AHO
COMMISSIONER

January 19, 2012

Senator Thomas B. Saviello, Co-Chair
Representative James M. Hamper; Co-Chair
Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0100

Dear Senator Saviello, Representative Hamper and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

I am pleased to provide you with this report pursuant to Resolve 2010, chapter 195, *To Continue Evaluating Climate Change Adaptation Options for the State*, as enacted by the 124th Legislature Second Regular Session. Specifically, Section 2 of the Resolve requires the Department of Environmental Protection to submit a final plan for state climate change adaptation to the Governor and joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over natural resources matters.

Background

Under Resolve 2009, chapter 16, the 124th Maine Legislature directed the Department of Environmental Protection to establish and convene a stakeholder group to “evaluate the options and actions available to Maine people and businesses to prepare for and adapt to the most likely impacts of climate change.” The Department was further directed to report recommendations related to the evaluation to the then Joint Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

Over 75 organizations, agencies, businesses, and public interest groups participated in a 35-member coordinating committee, or on one of four working groups that carried out initial assessments of Maine’s vulnerability in the natural, coastal, built, and human/social environments. In February 2010, the Department presented the report, “People and Nature Adapting to a Changing Climate: Charting Maine’s Course,” containing more than 60 recommendations for action to plan for changes to Maine’s climate. The report emphasized the need for planning and action at the local level, and recognized that creation of an actionable state-level climate adaptation plan requires years of work and significant expenditure of resources to assure widespread acceptance and implementation.

The report identified various state agencies as responsible for implementing one or more of the recommendations, including the Departments of Administrative and Financial Services, Agriculture, Conservation, Economic and Community Development, Environmental Protection,

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Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Marine Resources, and Transportation; and the State Planning Office, Centers for Disease Control, Geological Survey, and Emergency Management Agency.

Implementation

Many of the recommendations in the 2010 report are already being implemented, such as providing climate change awareness education to municipalities and local planning organizations, evaluating and revising regulations, mapping areas of vulnerability, and estimating cost impacts of no-action alternatives for capital improvements.

Throughout 2011, the Department conducted education and outreach efforts regarding projected impacts of climate change and available planning tools. The Department has worked in partnership with the Maine Municipal Association to encourage municipalities to include adaptation considerations in local planning efforts, such as storm drains and sewer systems, and for coastal zoning. The Maine State Planning Office maintains a “Planning for Climate Change” website containing links to planning tools and guidance, which connects to a lengthy list of resources provided online by the U.S. EPA’s State and Local Climate and Energy Program. The University of Maine has continued efforts to identify and develop climate change indicators usable by Maine communities and businesses in planning for current and anticipated climate change impacts.

A variety of municipalities, regional planning organizations and public interest groups associated with the stakeholder process have initiated or continued efforts in adaptation planning and action following the 2010 report. The Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission has been working in partnership with the Department of Conservation and the municipalities surrounding Casco Bay to continue adaptation planning efforts through the Sea Level Adaptation Working Group and the Coastal Hazard Resiliency Tools Project. Other planning efforts have been undertaken by the cities of Portland and Ellsworth, the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments, and the Greater Portland Council of Governments.

Recommendation

The Department recommends that the recommendations and strategies set forth in the 2010 report continue to serve as a working plan for the various agencies and organizations to develop and implement climate change adaptation efforts. Stakeholders have been identified, established working relationships, reached agreement on numerous points, and begun collaborative efforts to implement many of the necessary strategies to address problems that already exist and may be expected due to changes in Maine’s climate system. The limited resources of all stakeholders should be targeted toward continued implementation, rather than further document development.

If you have any questions or would like me to present this report to the committee, I am available at your request and convenience. You can reach me at 287-2812 or at Patricia.Aho@maine.gov.

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Sincerely,

Patricia W. Aho
Commissioner